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## **SESSION 3 – PAPER 4**

### **Sensing Print: Reflections on the Materiality of the Contemporary Art Print by Ruth Pelzer-Montada**

#### **Abstract**

My paper proposes that a comprehensive engagement with the materiality of the art print will enhance the reflection of contemporary print practice. Drawing on the field of material studies, it is suggested that the insights and approaches of this (relatively) new field are applicable to printmaking and its processes, including the digital, and deserve further investigation. Some of the basic tenets of a material studies approach are briefly outlined, especially the notion of 'embodied sensory knowledge' (Sutton, 2006). This avoids the historically dominant division of humans as separate from their products. This critical paradigm also assumes a changed materiality of culture at large through the impact of electronic technologies rather than framing such changes as a 'dematerialisation'. Insights drawn from material studies provide impulses for the contextualisation and reflection of the means of contemporary printmaking and the perception of the print both from the point of the viewer as well as the maker. Three concepts/analogies are suggested that may be further developed to address the changing materiality of the print: the 'screen' (Thrift, 2004), 'skin' (Lupton, 2002) and Didi-Huberman's (1999) examination of the cast or imprint. The paper ends with the discussion of an artwork that is not an actual print although it refers to print in its widest sense. It poetically embodies print's current situation and potential and moreover, demonstrates the productiveness of a material approach.

## **Sensing Print: Reflections on the Materiality of the Contemporary Art Print**

The present paper builds on my personal experience as a printmaker. Further it extends my presentations at previous IMPACT conferences towards a broader examination of the materiality of art prints.<sup>1</sup> While many of the following reflections and suggestions are not novel as such and have been in circulation in the broader field of cultural studies and art discourse, I present them here as a kind of speculative 'shopping list' of ideas to be further investigated in relation to prints and printmaking. Printmaking will benefit from ideas in material studies as they are being mapped out within the so-called 'material turn'. (Howes, 2005; Miller, 2005) Emanating from anthropology and cultural studies, this new critical paradigm has expanded and, to some extent, replaced the so-called 'linguistic' and 'pictorial' critical 'turns' of the late 20th century as well as the social and ideological critiques that prompted and accompanied these. While the materiality in/of art has been an underlying theme of art history, greater attention to art's material qualities is now a necessity.<sup>2</sup> The material turn is seen as critique of 'ingrained assumptions about the superiority of language over other forms of expression, such as visual/material forms, and constitutes objects as important bridges between mental and physical worlds. (Miller, 1987, pp.96-9)'. (Edwards and Hart, 2004, p.4)

If printmakers, maybe more than most artists, are supremely aware of the material conditions of producing their art, this is because 'techniques', and indeed 'technology', have played such a crucial role in printmaking's history. As is well known, in the context of 20th century modernism, printmaking's mechanical and reproductive nature placed printmaking at a disadvantage precisely because of its perceived excess of materiality (or the wrong kind of materiality).<sup>3</sup>

Yet too often the specific techniques and qualities of particular print modes, both traditional and digital, are still portrayed as a mere 'means to an end'.<sup>4</sup> The argument, familiar throughout art, has been voiced in printmaking especially in the context of the digital debate. It sees the 'end' in question or the true objective as the image or the 'concept'. The consequence is that the materiality in/of prints - as with other artistic media - 'is glossed merely as a neutral support for images'. (Edwards, 2004, p.2)<sup>5</sup>

Within the context of digital tools in print, there is anxiety around too much technique/technology and the concomitant disavowal of the hand-made. Such fears hint at wider concerns and critiques of the role of technology in general which have intensified due to the rapid spread of electronic means. They are ironic in the framework of printmaking due to its affiliation with technology in the first place. In art, such fears may be traced back to the Renaissance, if not earlier, to the difference between the liberal and

mechanical arts. While the former were considered a guarantor of authenticity, uniqueness and the aesthetic, the latter - according to Vasari's humanist conception – were dismissed. (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p.11)<sup>6</sup>

Today apprehension regarding digital technologies is linked to a general concern, often couched in dystopian terms, about a dematerialisation of experience (some of which is brought about by greater emphasis on and proliferation of images).<sup>7</sup> Such a view is, in effect, a symptom of the broader rejection (even misunderstanding) of materiality.<sup>8</sup> This is the result of a complex history. In this thinking, not only is the mind superior to the body, as far as the senses are concerned, but vision constitutes the highest sense.<sup>9</sup> Classen has argued that 'influential thinkers ... contributed to the exaltation of sight as the height of civilized, adult perception, and the denigration of touch as the sensory recourse of primitives and children.' (Classen, 2005b, p.283). Nevertheless, there is a concurrent association which holds that touch possesses a greater relationship to reality.<sup>10</sup>

One result of the complex and contradictory history of the senses is that - in the words of Daniel Miller - we 'do not recognise our creations as our own ... they take on their own interest and trajectory.' (Miller, 2005, p.8). In contrast to the common sense view of humans on the one hand and their creations on the other, material theory argues against 'the problematic dualism between persons and things'. (Miller, 2005, p.41). Moreover, materially directed studies aim to destabilise common sense assumptions about 'stable conceptions of what it is to be human and material... .' (Thrift, 2005, in Miller, p.232) With regard to technology, it is helpful to bear in mind, as Sutton points out, that 'human-environment interactions have always already been technologically mediated'. (Sutton, 2006, p.94)<sup>11</sup>

The notion of a complex and intimate interrelationship between humans and their creations, including technology, is further supported by research into the functioning of the brain and mind. As philosopher and neuroscientist Andy Clarke has argued: 'What the old body-mind problem debate did not sufficiently address is the *mind-body-scaffolding* problem! It is the problem of understanding how human thought and reason is born out of looping interactions between material brains, material bodies, and complex cultural and technological environments.'<sup>12</sup> [Italics in original] (Clarke, 2003, p.11)

Such insights are especially helpful in re-thinking the practical operations in which artists are engaged when producing a work. As Sutton points out, the denigration of the senses, particularly modernity's 'uncomfortable relationship to the "lower senses", has also led to a 'devaluation of "practical knowledge", "tradition", and "social embeddedness"' which is evident in art discourse and practice and pertains to 'issues of skill, memory, and embodied sensory knowledge'. (Sutton, 2006, p.87)

Moreover, Sutton's remarks (pertaining to cooking) can also be applied to the processes and skills printmakers are involved in which often appear purely intuitive or even 'natural'. What he refers to as 'habit memories' are acquired through 'enculturation' and 'enskillment'. Yet they appear not to require 'explicit reflection on their performance' and seem therefore 'naturalised'. (Sutton, 2006, p.90)<sup>13</sup>

Crucially, the seeming dematerialisation of culture, bemoaned by many, is in this conception not dematerialisation at all, merely a re-thinking of materiality. Katherine Hayles's remark vis a vis Virtual Reality (VR) technologies applies in a broader sense too: 'It is never (...) a matter of "leaving the body behind". Instead, the technologies of telepresence and VR are about 'extending embodied awareness; highly specific local and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prostheses.' (Hayles, 1999, p.291, in Clarke, 2003, p.114)<sup>14</sup> Apart from the specific digital technologies mentioned by Hayles, which are still at a developmental stage, it can be observed that many digital media – which were thought of as dematerialising the world – are themselves becoming haptic, as with the touch screens of mobile phones and elsewhere.

There is a larger issue at stake here: 'as intelligence is designed into everyday products we are reminded of the premodern notion that there is no inanimate matter' (Kuechler, 2005, p.208). In other words, the technologies that are seemingly causing the dematerialisation and 'disenchantment' of the world also assume qualities that lead to its 're-enchantment'.

To summarise, material theory thus involves 'a theory of signification in which materiality is integral, not subservient' which allows us to rethink materiality itself. It adopts 'an approach to the sign that takes the tangible and sensual aspect of our engagement with the world and respects its evident centrality to the way we think and practice in the world.' (Miller, 2005, p.31)

With regard to print, anthropologist E Edwards's remarks on the photograph as a material object are instructive. Like photographs, prints have 'volume, opacity, tactility and a physical presence in the world (Batchen, 1997, p.2) and are thus enmeshed with subjective, embodied and sensuous interactions.' (Edwards, 2004, p.1) As with other cultural products, 'materiality and meaning are bound up in a complex, synergistic and symbiotic relationship'. (Sassoon in Edwards, 2004, p.199)

While a material approach is useful to **all** prints, it may be worthwhile to differentiate between prints that invite or are conceived to encourage touch and those that operate by visual touch alone.<sup>15</sup> A further differentiation ought to be made between the perception of print by the viewer and the artist him/herself during the process of making a print, as already indicated.<sup>16</sup>

To ask as to the materiality of the print is especially apposite in light of its supposed erosion through digital formats. Investigating print's changing materiality is further prompted by the increasing expansion of print into three dimensions in the form of installations or three-dimensional objects such as banners, paper cups, clothes and so on.<sup>17</sup> But the question of the materiality of the print applies to its more traditional formats as well.

Prints now participate in what has been described as a 'proliferation of generalized surfaces'. (Thrift, 2004, p.246) More specifically, the changing materiality of the print may be addressed by utilising the notions of the 'screen' (Thrift, 2004) and 'skin' (Lupton, 2002). Georges Didi-Huberman's (1999) investigation of the cast or imprint also allows a materially inspired approach to prints.

In the centuries preceding the arrival of photography prints may have fulfilled the function of 'proto-screens'. Their (relative) ubiquity and 'window-on-the-world' quality meant that handling prints of a far-away place, for example, may have been closely affiliated with the extinguishing of space and time that a material object can prompt.<sup>18</sup>

In many ways, today's screens can be seen as a follow-up to prints as proto-screens. Thrift characterises the pervasiveness of screens or screen-like surfaces all around us - not just computer screens - as 'a vast geographical web of perception, a vast epistemic apparatus, and a new form of inhabitation' that form 'the constants of everyday life'. (Thrift, 2004, p.233/234)<sup>19</sup>

But what is a screen? Thrift refers to Knorr Cetina and Bruegger (2002, p.397) who clearly think of the computer, rather than a television or a cinema screen when they say: it is a 'wired, programmed and content-filled, textually elaborated surface that fascinates through its ability to frame and present a world' (Thrift, 2005, p.235). Other writers home in on the effect of such screen presence when they note some 'strictures', such as 'a certain tensioning of consciousness, a specific form of self-experience, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time-horizon' that is affiliated with screens in our lives. (ibid.) While the details may be specific to computer screens, the list points to questions we may wish to ask of prints. What kind of attention, what consciousness goes along with the print as screen?<sup>20</sup> Does the 'awakeness' which Thrift posits for screen images also apply to the print as screen? Does the presentation of prints in actual frames and glass cases or the analogy of the printed book with a computer/laptop screen heighten such awakeness or diffuse it?<sup>21</sup>

Like the computer screen, the print as screen (I am here mostly thinking of conventional prints rather than the 'paperless print' which Paul Thompson

has explored in his contribution to the conference) is the result of technological intervention at a number of levels. These can be wholly digitally based, or a mixture of new and older technologies, where work on the computer is combined with traditional printing techniques.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the computer screen, such a print is mostly a hybrid: It is technologically, digitally created – with the help of a screen – **and** forms a material, sensory ‘screen’ or ‘skin’. In contrast to the often fast-changing images on digital and other screens, the print as screen arrests mobility through its sensuous presentation and framing of the world.

Vivien Sobchak’s (1992) comment on the cinematic screen may also be applied to the print: ‘The screen, then, is the substantial “flesh” that allows the perceptive activity of the film situated presence and finite articulation. The screen is the material substance that enables the frame its function.’ (Sobchak, p.211) In the case of the print the term ‘screen’ relates to the paper or support while ‘frame’ is not to be read as the literal frame of the image but as the (invisible) edge that determines its shape. This is an issue that is now frequently addressed by printmakers who do not adhere to the picture-in-the-frame-on-the-wall format.<sup>23</sup>

If the screen aspect of prints may imply a certain distance, the notion of print as skin allows both the viewer and the artist to think about its tactile, visceral surface, even if this is not denoted by the actual possibility of touching the print.<sup>24</sup> But skin, in Michel Serres’s conception, is much more. It epitomises the permeability, the intermingling of world and self and consequently is linked to knowledge. (Connor, 2005, p.322/23) Furthermore, skin ‘stands as a model for the way in which all the senses in their turn also invaginate all the others.’ (ibid) Skin as metaphor and sensuous analogy serves to highlight the way in which the surface of the print is perceived and points to visual perception’s merging with the other senses.

With its implication of touch, print as skin refers both to the immediate, visible surface of the print but also hints at it as a foil or layer. ‘Skin is both dead and alive. The thin outer layer, the epidermis consists of strata of cells that migrate towards the surface, where they compact into a layer of dead material. Skin’s protective function relies on the inertness of this outer layer.’ (Lupton, 2002, p.31) In the context of (relative) digital dematerialisation print as skin reminds of us of the touching of different layers or planes, the condensation that is the surface of both older and (increasingly) newer print technologies.<sup>25</sup>

Art historian Didi-Huberman’s (1999) study of the cast or imprint offers further insight into this aspect of prints. He says that there is a paradox at play in each object that is made as a cast or by an imprint. The cast as a result of touch does not permit irrevocable proof as to the original object of that touch. Contact has occurred, but we do not know with whom or what or

when and what was the original object. (Huberman, 1999, p.190)<sup>26</sup> Hence he diagnoses a double, contradictory aspect in the imprint or cast. This implies touch or presence on the one hand and separation, loss, absence on the other. (ibid) The twofold character of the imprint or cast explains, according to Didi-Huberman, its potential as well as its instability.

Unlike the imprint or cast, in the print the absence of contact is not foregrounded but forms the substrate of its effect and affect.<sup>27</sup> For the viewer, this double effect may pinpoint what Didi-Huberman calls an 'unease in representation' (Didi-Huberman, 1999, p.191). Just as the spectator of an imprint or cast can never be sure as to what exactly they are looking at, as indicated above, so the viewer of a print is never quite sure as to the source of the image or the contact that has occurred and what was the original object or image. For the maker, the alteration between absence and touch in creating the different states of a print are even crucial.<sup>28</sup>

Instead of a conclusion, I would like to leave the reader with an (art) object 'to think with' that is not a print in the conventional sense but that encompasses the idea of print in an age of changing materiality and the idea of a sensuous visuality by way of a poetic allusion:

It is the work by a German artist duo, based in Edinburgh, who call themselves *~in the fields*. The artwork's title is *ink*. It was executed in 2008 on occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of printing in Scotland.<sup>29</sup> The artists used texts found through research in the National Library of Scotland and the collection of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh - hand-written comments or annotations written in the margins of books from each of the five centuries since the invention of print – from the Bible, from a copy of Arabian nights, a songbook and books about Natural History and Botany.

The work consists of five colourless glass spheres, suspended from the ceiling at eye height. These are partly filled with ink. As the viewer approaches them, the orbs begin to rotate; the ink then swirls inside the spheres and coats the inside walls, forming a moving substrate or transparent matrix, both skin and screen, as it were. Simultaneously, inside the each semi-transparent globe with its ink coated walls one of the five texts appears written in light. (This is technically achieved by a spinning armature, whereby the writing becomes visible due to the phenomenon of the persistence of vision.)

*Ink* successfully oscillates between material object and seemingly dematerialised appearance – the light writing appears as if by magic. Moreover, it is not writing in the usual sense but a literal manifestation of the effect of lit screens around us: It 'in-forms' as it illuminates. This making concrete of the 'light-writing', so commonplace and unacknowledged in our everyday lives, is made visible through a kind of primitivising reversal.



Writing and ink, historically sandwiched together, are separated. The centuries old substance of ink still serves as a means to writing - but as a fluid matrix, not a rigid medium. The historical stillness and opaque character of letter-fonts is also expunged – they emerge as flickering sparks, hovering between striking presence and charged absence.

The writing as light imprints itself on the eye of the beholder. In the work that the viewer has to carry out, looking and thinking appear as a sensuous fusion. Vision and understanding are palpably performed as an embodied act of the senses: It is only through the viewer's proximity to the piece, his/her kinesis, a gesture that approximates but isn't a touch, that each globe begins to rotate and the writing appears. Medium and thought are intertwined, and moreover animated, on the move, forever changing.

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<sup>1</sup> The first IMPACT conference proved to be inspirational for my own interest in and practice of printmaking. Kathryn Reeves's call for a 're-vision of printmaking' prompted me to include theoretical aspects as well as practical ones in my research as shown in my contributions to IMPACT II, III and IV:

- 'Authenticity - A Red Herring?' at IMPACT II in Helsinki, 2001 attempted to re-define the concept of authenticity in print in light of postmodern practices by focussing on the work of Friedhardt Kieken and my own. Available at:

- <http://www2.uiah.fi/conferences/impact/> [accessed 08/05/2007]

- 'Technology versus Concept, or The Site of Practice versus the Bite of Theory' at IMPACT III, Capetown 2003, argued for a concept of the 'craft' of printmaking that is inclusive of a culturally understood notion of technique/technology and thus encompasses rather than repudiates theory. This presentation was published in: *Contemporary Impressions* - the Journal of the American Print Alliance Vol 12 #2, 2004

- 'Printmaking's Kontaktfreudigkeit or the Discursivity of Print' employed the critical categories of citationality and performativity to elucidate prints and their interrelationship with the wider context of visual culture and the viewing subject. (IMPACT IV, Berlin-Posznan 2005). An extended version was published in: *Visual Culture in Britain* (Vol 9, Nr 1)

<sup>2</sup> See Bredekamp (2006). Evidence can also be seen, for example, in the publication of a book by art historian Monika Wagner (2001), published in German, with the title *Das Material der Kunst*, literally, 'The material/s of art'.

<sup>3</sup> That such misplaced identification of printmaking with techniques/technology still prevails – if not in the minds of printmakers then in the assumptions of the general public - was shown recently by the explicit guarding against this assumption. The introduction to the Northern Print Biennale 2009 in Newcastle, billed as 'the first major survey of printmaking in the UK for twenty years' stated in the catalogue and the exhibition: '... the exhibition will show that printmaking is not essentially about technique – but about ideas and communication.' (Welcome address of the director of Northern Print Studio to the Biennale, see exhibition and catalogue Northern Print (2009) n.p.)

<sup>4</sup> Such a view prevails despite the fact that there is a considerable concern with techniques and the development or adaptation of, for example, commercial technologies. For the former, see the information on print techniques which accompanies individual works in the catalogue mentioned in endnote 3 and in Saunders's and Miles's (2006) survey. The actual techniques employed by the artists by far exceed the explanation of print processes in the glossary. The modification of commercial technologies to suits the needs of print artists is one of the main research areas of Centre for Fine Print Research (CFPR) in Bristol.

<sup>5</sup> With regard to print one particular exception that comes to mind is Kathryn Reeves's essay on the mini print for *Relativities: 4th British International Miniature Print Exhibition* catalogue, 2000. The recently published report by Coldwell/Rauch (2009) on 'the personalised surface' in digital printmaking also seeks to illuminate the interrelationship between techniques and processes and meaning.

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<sup>6</sup> My (free) translation from the German version of Didi-Huberman's book.

<sup>7</sup> Authors such as Jean Baudrillard and anthropologist Tim Ingold speak of a 'disenchantment' of the world. This is brought about by the technological and bureaucratic permeation of ever more aspects of life, resulting in the loss of the 'real' versus seemingly disembodied technically mediated procedures. For Ingold, 'technology involves "an objectification of productive forces" (Ingold, 2003, p.319), a disembodying and disembedding.' (Sutton, 2006, p.92)

<sup>8</sup> There **are** of course real changes and even dangers affiliated with digital technologies. Take the example of the digitization of photographs. As Joanna Sassoon has said: 'Digitisation is not simply a translation of tones or a simple technological process. With not only its changes in physical state but also the concomitant changes in meaning, digitizing is essentially a cultural problem.' (Sassoon, 2004, p200) She quotes Rayward who argues that 'in the process of becoming an increasingly image-based culture, the universal equality of digital images overrides material differences between objects through the creation of a morass of digital mono-media (Rayward, 1998, p214).' (Sassoon, 2004, p. 201) While I do not fully share this particular dystopian view – after all, similar points could be made about the leveling effects of photographs since the nineteenth century – my colleague, print artist and educator Jo Ganter alerted me to some issues that she has observed with printmaking students. There is, for example, the fact that digitally produced and printed images which appear to adopt the syntax of, say, a wood cut or a lithograph still only *look* like the real thing and function merely as a quotation of said techniques. More importantly, in such digital prints, she noted the paucity of the more subtle codings and unique syntax that the traditional modes allow. Conversation with Jo Ganter at Edinburgh College of Art, Summer 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Constance Classen, amongst others, points out how the greater 'visualism' of modernity with its 'eye catching displays of consumer goods in the new department stores' was accompanied by positioning sight 'at the top of the scale of human and social evolution by contemporary scholarship'. (Classen, 2005b, p.283)

<sup>10</sup> 'The sense of touch ... is perceived as annihilating not only space, but also time.' (Classen, 2005b, p.278) An example would be the touching an object, such as a holiday souvenir or memento, which seems to connect us with the person/object across space and time.

<sup>11</sup> Such a view draws the line between 'tools' (often conceived as an extension of the body) and technology (where humans become mere operators) less sharply than Baudrillard or Ingold, as explained earlier. The conceptualization of an object as 'tool' or 'technology' changes historically. From our perspective, the early printing press appears as a 'tool' despite the fact that for fifteenth century printers and the public they must have been the height of 'technology'. Conversely, the computer is often referred to as a 'tool' despite its sophisticated technological underpinning.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke's use of the term 'scaffolding' is derived from Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and denotes 'any kind of external aid and support, whether provided by a

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notepad, a computer, or another human being.' (Vygotsky, L. *Thought and Language* 1986, Cambridge Mass MIT Press quoted in Clarke, footnote 9 p.202)

<sup>13</sup> Ingold makes a related, but different point when he emphasises that 'objects, because of their sensual properties, "afford" certain possibilities for human use, the semiotic and the material constantly cross-cut and convert into each other ... .' (Sutton, 2006, p.92) This is the case with digital media as much as with traditional ones. A telling example that goes right into the 'heart' of digital prints is provided by Coldwell (2009). In collaboration with the artist and programmer Eli Zafran, Tim Head produced three unique prints (*Dust Flowers*, 2006) which were based on the deciphering of the code of the ink jet printer. This is in contrast to the usual procedure where a software programme, such as Photoshop, generates an image that is physically generated by the printer. As Coldwell says, 'In essence, Head's prints represent a concrete manifestation of the inkjet process.' (Coldwell, 2009, p.14) Head himself puts it like this: 'My approach sets out to redefine the prescribed role of the commercial inkjet printer, diverting it from an industrially refined reproduction machine into a direct primary printing medium in its own right.' (Coldwell, 2009, p.15)

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there is the question of just how 'immaterial' digital images themselves actually are. Marks, for example, questions the supposed loss of materiality in digital and other electronic images and says that they are 'no less material than photography, film and analogue video'. (Marks, 2002, pp.161-175) Thrift makes a comparable point with regard to film, quoting Moore: 'Things and people are made of the same atomic material, just as in the cinema they are made of the same celluloid material. ... celluloid takes on the animistic character of the atom, the single element that fashions the universe. Film images, including those of people, are things, and all things on celluloid are thereby reanimated and thus directly expressive.' (Moore, 2000, pp.68-69, in Thrift, 2005, p.232)

<sup>15</sup> For suggestions as to the differentiation of visual touch or a haptics in print, see my essay 'The Attraction of Print'. (Pelzer-Montada, 2008.) A shorter version is published in Coldwell/Rauch (2009). The article will be published on the printmaking web forum *Printeresting* later this autumn. [available at <http://www.printeresting.org/>; accessed 20/08/09]

While prints that operate by visual touch alone may constitute the majority of prints, whether digital, non-digital or as installation, many are now conceived to encourage actual touch. A recent example at the Northern Print Biennale was Imi Maufe's *Passport* to the Biennale which encouraged visitors to collect individual stamps from the different venues on an A4 sheet designed for the purpose. They could then create their 'passport' (really a memento of their visit) through further interaction by cutting and folding the stamped A4 sheet.

[available on <http://www.northernprint.org.uk/pages/northern-print-biennale/download-map.php>; or <http://tinyurl.com/mxblw5> accessed 20/08/09]

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, print conferences provide many excellent examples. See also Coldwell/Rauch (2009) for reports of artists' processes, as already mentioned.

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<sup>17</sup> See Gill Saunders and Rosie Miles (2006) *Prints Now: Directions and Definitions*, New York: Harry Abrams

<sup>18</sup> See endnote 10.

<sup>19</sup> The obvious examples are the now all-pervasive mobile phone or computer screens – recently I visited friends for dinner and instead of a cook book there was a computer screen with the recipe on the kitchen table. Another friend enjoys watching film DVDs on her lap top in bed. These are just two modest, if typical examples of such ‘new forms of inhabitation’.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Crary’s (1999) observations regarding attention and absorption of images in modernity could provide inspiration for an investigation of how these registers of engagement apply to prints.

<sup>21</sup> An example of a heightening of attention in my view is Michael Craig-Martin’s ink jet print *Tokyo Sunset* which could be viewed in the Northern Print Biennale. The print sits immediately below the surface of a deep Perspex casing. Here, the surface of the print fuses with the Perspex cover. Due to the depth of the support a seemingly solid, shiny object is created that arrests attention and startles the viewer into ‘awakeness’ with its seamless fusion of smoothly graded dayglo colours. Needless to say, this effect is not apparent in a photographic reproduction.

<sup>22</sup> For the former, see Michael-Craig Martin’s print mentioned in footnote 21; for the latter, see Coldwell’s discussion of his own work, in Coldwell/Rauch, 2009, pp.17-19.

<sup>23</sup> Two examples from the Northern Print Biennale were Elizabeth Klimek’s solvent transfer lithographic prints in the shape of small abstracted houses and Richard Woods’ benches. See also Saunders and Miles (2006) for numerous examples.

<sup>24</sup> Emma Stibbon’s *Abandoned Whaling Station, Deception Island*, 2007, woodcut, 117 x 238cm, printed on Japanese paper, is an instance of the print as both screen and skin. This work is pinned straight to the wall. Its size echoes and challenges the screens around us which are becoming more frequent and larger. This monumentality also elevates what could be regarded as a ‘mere’ documentary image, clearly camera-based, hence a ‘screen’, to a subject matter worthy of sustained reflection. The viscosity of the wood cut technique is crucial and arresting: It challenges the smooth surfaces of photographic screens and creates a haptic vision that powerfully alludes to the complex social and geo-political as well as local issues to which the title, and with it the image, allude. Yet, the simple attachment of the pliable paper to the wall - rather than as a framed and sealed object – turns the piece more into textile or skin than screen. It thus serves to imbue the image and the viewer with a sense of vulnerability, impermanence and hence melancholy and loss.

<sup>25</sup> What this layering means (or doesn’t) with regard to digital printers, or indeed, the construction and perception of a print on the computer screen, requires further discussion. See Coldwell (2009) on the differences between a purely digital output



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and more traditional methods in regard of his own work as mentioned in footnote 22. Further interesting comments on this issue are found in Coldwell's interview with Michael Craig-Martin. (Coldwell, 2009, pp 89-90)

<sup>26</sup> My (free) translation of: 'Dies ist letztlich die Paradoxie eines jeden durch Abdruck hergestellten Objekts: die Berührung deren legitimer Träger es ist, .. erlaubt uns dennoch nicht die zweifelsfreie Identifikation des realen dargestellten Gegenstands. Ein Kontakt hat stattgefunden, doch Kontakt mit wem, mit was, wann, mit welchem ursprünglichen Objekt?' (Didi-Hubermann, 1999, p.190)

<sup>27</sup> From the perspective of the viewer, curator Marilyn Kuschner writes: 'One can wonder if the surface that we see on a printed image is actually the only surface of the object. The computer program affords the artist an opportunity to layer image upon image. What are we left with is a surface that may appear to be flat but one which actually holds the key to a depth of layers that remain in the computer. But are these to be considered integral to the surface of this image? Is the entire work only the output of the printer or should one also include images below the surface that have become part of what we see with the naked eye?' (Kuschner, 2009, p. 28)

<sup>28</sup> This play between absence and presence – although present in traditional print modes - may also be considered as a vital element of working at/with the computer. Kuschner's description above may be transposed to the situation of the artist working on a print on screen.

<sup>29</sup> For images of the work, see the artists' web site [available on: <http://www.in-the-fields.org/?p=8>; accessed 25/05/11].